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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S PARTY POLLS WELL BUT GRASSROOTS  
SUPPORT STILL A QUESTION

REF: A. JAKARTA 00246

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 0024 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD) is doing well in public opinion surveys, thanks in part to a successful media strategy. Although it seems poised to do well in the national legislative elections slated for April 9, questions persist about the strength of its grassroots organization. PD, a new party, might find it difficult to compete with larger, more well-established parties which have deeply entrenched roots in villages nation-wide. If PD's ground game can get out the vote, however, President Yudhoyono will be well set for the July presidential elections. END SUMMARY.

#### PRESIDENT'S PARTY DOING WELL IN POLLS

[1](#)2. (SBU) President Yudhoyono's PD party has earned solid reviews recently. The party's popularity has shot up in past months, from under 10 percent in mid-2008 to 17 percent in November to 23 percent in January (see ref A). The party's high ratings are trumping even those of much more well-established parties, such as Golkar and the Indonesian Party of Democratic Struggle (PDI-P).

[1](#)3. (SBU) In making these gains, PD's proactive media campaign has helped immensely. PD airs well-received television ads featuring President Yudhoyono (who is quite popular) that trumpet GOI achievements, and include winning themes such as "just say no" to corruption and holiday messages tailored for different ethnic groups. In recent visits to Bandung in West Java, Semarang in Central Java, and Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, observers confirmed to Pol/C that these TV and radio ads were hitting home and making PD a strong contender in these areas.

#### HOW STRONG IS THE GROUND GAME?

[1](#)4. (C) Serious questions remain, however, about the strength of PD's grassroots organization. Since its formation in 2001, the party's base has traditionally been the upper middle and middle classes, and some elements of the Chinese business community. Although the President's popularity with all groups of voters is shown consistently in surveys, it is unclear whether PD's party machinery can successfully spread the word, link the party to the President's popularity, and get votes from poorer voters and the lower middle class on election day.

[1](#)5. (C) President Yudhoyono himself has stressed the importance of improving both the quality of PD's legislative candidates in 2009 and their ability to reach out to the grassroots. According to Presidential Spokesperson Andi Mallarangeng, closing the gap between PD's popularity and President Yudhoyono's is a crucial PD goal in 2009. Members of the PD party hierarchy in Jakarta have told poloffs that the party has made a real organizational effort and hopes to

improve upon its performance in 2004 when PD netted just over 7 percent of the national vote (a strong performance by a new party).

16. (C) The final results of PD's efforts to engage the grassroots level are not yet in. Observers in West Java, Indonesia's largest province with over 40 million people, however, say that the party has made a real effort to reach out from its urban bastions of support into rural and semi-rural areas. Major General (ret'd) Iwan Sulanjana, the head of PD in West Java, told Pol/C that the party was making a "massive effort to target all classes of voter thanks to the support of thousands of campaign workers" and he predicted that the party would have success. That said, most observers assert that the party still was not as strong with less affluent voters as Golkar or PDI-P. When asked about this, Sulanjana said he hoped that "between President Yudhoyono's popularity, the party's advertisements and its organization" that it would be able "to mobilize voters and get them to the polls."

#### ENTERING THE FINAL STRETCH

17. (C) The national campaign is set to intensify, with all-out campaigning beginning (per regulation) on March 16 and ending on April 6. During this timeframe, parties will be holding huge rallies at sites throughout the nation in a bid to build enthusiasm for their candidate lists. PD will be pressed during this timeframe as it tries to match Golkar and PDIP which have for years shown the ability to sustain intense national campaigns down the stretch. Mission has been told that President Yudhoyono will be campaigning around the country aggressively during this timeframe, leading his party at multiple mass rallies. This no doubt should assist PD's ground game.

18. (C) Given past patterns of Indonesian politics, it is this type of organization and outreach at the grassroots level that may well in the end determine how things play out on election day. PD has clearly made progress in these areas and, if it can get its voters to the polls on April 9, President Yudhoyono will be well set up for the July presidential election. If it doesn't, his road might be somewhat harder--even with his very real popularity--given Indonesia's electoral rules, which mandate that a candidate requires a certain level of support based on the legislative election in order to get on the presidential ballot.

HUME